



NEWS RELEASE

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Owner of Anaheim's Eureka Institute Convicted in Illegal Therapy Case

Physical Therapy Board Says Case Underscores Need to Check Practitioners' Licenses

SACRAMENTO – For the second time in four years, the operator of a southern California rehabilitation program for neurologically disabled children has run afoul of state law by providing unlicensed physical therapy, this time after a Granite Bay couple complained their four-year-old son was injured during treatment.

Grace Hua Wu, 51, of Fullerton, pleaded guilty in December in Orange County Superior Court to one count of unlicensed physical therapy at her Anaheim business, the Eureka Institute. She was sentenced to one year probation.

Officials at the Physical Therapy Board of California (PTBC), which launched the latest inquiry with the Department of Consumer Affairs' Division of Investigation, say the case illustrates the dangers unlicensed activity can pose for consumers and how important it is for consumers to check a potential physical therapy provider's license before treatment.

"The treatment provided by the Institute is not up to the standards of licensed physical therapists," said Steve Hartzell, Executive Office of the PTBC. "The Institute caters to children with various neurological disabilities. Such children are often prone to injury. Anyone performing physical therapy who doesn't know what he or she is doing is asking for trouble. The whole point of the Board is to make sure that people who provide this type of treatment have met the established requirements."

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The filing of a criminal charge represents an escalation in the Board's effort against unlicensed activity at the Institute: Ms. Wu was cited administratively for the same offense in 2003 and fined \$2,500.

"Consumers deserve physical therapy that follows the high standards set by the profession and the Board, and the Eureka Institute has a history of misrepresenting its services," Hartzell said.

It was a complaint from a Granite Bay couple that their four-year-old boy, who has cerebral palsy, was injured during treatment that led to the latest investigation of Ms. Wu's business.

According to the couple's complaint, filed with the PTBC in January 2005, a woman the couple believed at the time to be a physical therapist broke the boy's foot while stretching his Achilles tendon, despite the child's obvious discomfort and his mother's warning that the woman was working him too hard.

After reviewing the case and deciding to proceed with a criminal action, the Board contacted the Orange County District Attorney's Office, which agreed to investigate also and take the case to court.

During the course of two visits to the Institute, one of them with a search warrant, investigators from the Department of Consumer Affairs and the Orange County District Attorney's office inspected the site and interviewed employees. They also seized medical records, charts and other documents, which were then reviewed by a consultant retained by the Board as an expert.

In the opinion of the expert, the Institute was providing physical therapy with unlicensed personnel and in a manner far beneath established standards. Information on patients' charts and records was often incomplete, or so general it could apply to all patients — so general, in fact, the investigators said much of it appeared to be have been cut-and-pasted on a computer; notes one would expect to find were non-existent.

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The investigation found that while the Institute did employ a licensed physical therapist, she only worked there a few days a week and did not directly supervise treatment, as required by law. Moreover, the treatment itself was performed by individuals who said they had been trained as physical therapists in Poland, but who did not have licenses to practice in California.

Meanwhile, the Institute was claiming to be performing physical therapy to its clients, on its Web site and its insurance billings.

During her interview with investigators, Ms. Wu claimed she was unaware of the state's rules governing physical therapy.

The case underscores how important it is for consumers to make sure their physical therapist is licensed before treatment begins, PTBC officials say. A license offers consumers assurance that the practitioner has met minimum qualifications. It also provides greater public protection in the event something goes wrong because the Board can restrict, suspend and even revoke the license of a practitioner for violating applicable laws and regulations.

Consumers can check a physical therapist's license by visiting the PTBC's Web site at <http://www.ptb.ca.gov>, or by calling DCA's Consumer Information Center toll-free at 800-952-5210.

The mission of the Physical Therapy Board of California is to promote and protect the interests of the people of California by the effective and consistent administration and enforcement of the Physical Therapy Practice Act. For other consumer information, visit the Board's Web site at the above link.

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